

STALL ENDS IN CHOIR, WELLS CATHEDRAL.

THE accompanying engraving illustrates one of the stall ends in the choir of Wells Cathedral, of which there are three varieties. That now given is the best in design. The execution of the carving of these stall ends and of the misericords is truly exquisite.

HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF PAINTING AS FORMERLY USED IN CHURCHES.

As the discovery of painting on the walls of churches is now of daily occurrence, perhaps it may not be uninteresting to offer a brief history of the practice of decorating churches with religious pictures, from its gradual introduction until the period of the Reformation, when, in this country, at least, the practice received a death blow from which it has never entirely recovered.

The earlier Christian converts being Jews, carried with them all those prejudices against the representation of life, so rigidly guarded against by their law, as well as by the often denounced practice of the pagan nations by which they were surrounded. Their zeal, indeed, against the arts, so extensively used in the heathen temples, may be learnt from the strong invectives of their apologists. They even carried their enmity against the artists themselves, excluding them from their communion, if, as converts, they continued to practise the hated profession, and denying the rite of baptism to those candidates for admission unless they renounced it. As they obtained more power and influence, we have instances of fanatical rage similar to that of the Puritans of a later time; and, perhaps, the progress of Christianity more than any other cause hastened the downfall of the already declining art of antiquity.

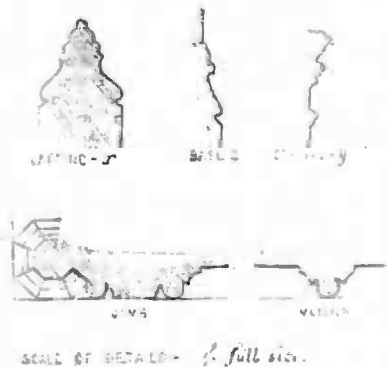
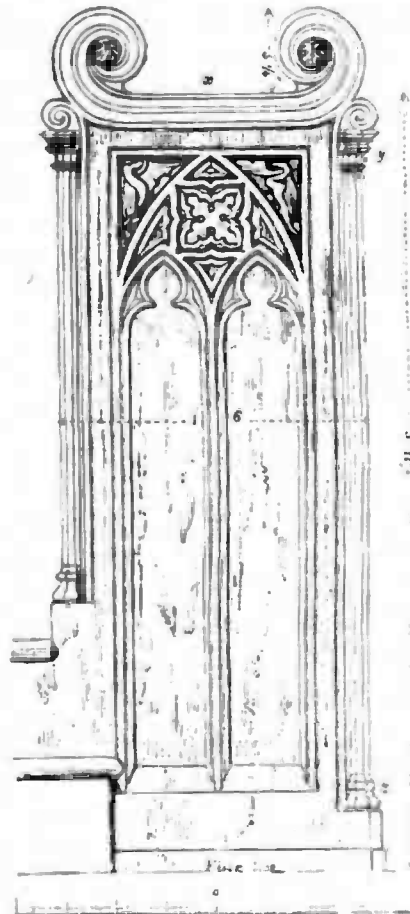
But it is evident, that the accession of heathen converts to their communion must gradually have weakened this prejudice; and, indeed, I shall presently have occasion to shew, that it was from among them that the practice first obtained.

The first public notice that we find taken of paintings in churches, is among the canons of a provincial council, held at Elvira, now known as the city of Elvira, in Spain. The precise date of this assembly is unknown, but it was near the close of the 3rd century. The words of the canon, by which the practice is unreservedly condemned, are emphatic and precise. It says:—"It hath pleased that pictures in churches ought not to be, neither way what is worshipped or adored be painted on the walls."

This condemnation of itself argues a somewhat extensive application of a principle, but it must be observed that in this sentence we must not recognize the voice of the church, for it is certain that it never received universal attention, and in all probability its influence was not felt beyond the province in which the council was assembled.

The first indications of a yearning towards representation to the Christian society, was evidenced by the use of symbolic forms; such, for instance, as the fish, the lyre, the dove, the lamb, the vine, the palm, the ship, the anchor, to which may be added the cross as probably the earliest of all, and the monogram of the holy name. It is in the catacombs of Rome, places consecrated so early to Christian worship, through the danger to which its early profession was exposed, that we meet with the earliest examples of the use of painting in the new religion. These are very evidently the productions of converts from the heathen, as they so closely resemble in style and character the previous pagan decoration. Indeed, this resemblance is so remarkable, that it requires a very narrow examination of the subjects to distinguish the one from the other. It is also observable that the selection of subjects betrays extreme caution and reserve, those having an indirect allusion to the doctrines of Christianity by way of antitype, being at all times preferred. Of these, the most frequent was the story of the Prophet Jonah, which was generally told in four compartments: the first

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shows a naked figure of the prophet reclining beneath a frame, on which the gourds are trained; the second shows the mariners casting him into the sea, and it must here be remarked that the idea of the whale is curiously expressed by an animal resembling the sea horse of classic antiquity; the third, the monster casting him upon land, and the fourth represents him seated.

A selection of miracles from the Old Testament was also of frequent occurrence arranged together; thus Noah receiving the dove returning with the olive branch, Moses striking the rock, the Manna in the wilderness, Abraham about to offer up his son Isaac, and a few others. Of subjects from the New Testament, though rarer, many were particularly selected, such as the paralytic carrying his bed, the raising of Lazarus, restoring the blind to

right; and the manner of treating these subjects was peculiar, and exhibited a symbolic tendency. The introduction of the figure of the Saviour is rare, unless it be under the form of the good shepherd carrying on his shoulders a lamb strayed from the flock; but there is no attempt at any peculiar elevation of character. Another popular subject belongs to this period of Christian art, and this only: it is that of Orpheus playing on the lyre, plainly taken from pagan art, although there was a strong inclination to give to the Orphic hymns a prophetic character. The earliest design in which the virgin and child are introduced is in the catacombs of S. Callixtus, Pope on the Appian way; this is the adoration of the magi, who are all represented in the Phrygian cap. It would be impossible in the brief space to which I must confine myself, to